

VII.

THE FIGHT AGAINST COMPANY UNIONISM.

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One of the most striking and significant developments of recent years in American industry, is the growth of company unionism, as part of the general movement towards class collaboration. This constitutes a marked change in the policy of American employers. The traditional policy of the militant capitalist class in practically every industry has been to crush out every form of organization among the workers. This was the "open shop" movement in its most

primitive forms. Now the employers, especially in the trustified industries, are departing from this program and are organizing their workers in the peculiarly American form of organization properly dubbed company unions.

The economic basis for the growth of the company union movement is found in the fact that the American imperialists, in their aggressive fight for world domination, have an imperative need for cheaper production and a docile working class. Through company unionism the employers seek to achieve these ends. The very breath of life of company unionism is to increase the efficiency of the workers. In all the deliberations of these organizations, this leading motive is never lost sight of. But closely associated with it is the ever-present effort to blur class lines and to prevent the growth of class consciousness and trade union organization amongst the workers. Company unionism is the brain product of the modern industrial engineers, whose aim is to at once raise the productivity of the workers and to demoralize them that they cannot effectively fight against their exploiters.

The rapid growth of company unionism is a striking evidence of the failure of conservative trade unionism. It is significant that company unionism has its stronghold in the trustified industries, such as meat packing, steel, electrical, textile, railroad, general transport, public utilities, agricultural machinery, etc. It is exactly in these industries that the failure of the trade unions to adopt policies and organizational forms that would fit them to fight effectively against modern organized capital, has registered most disastrously for the working class. Old line trade unions, organized on the basis of crafts and following the customary reactionary policies, could not live in these industries. The bureaucrats at the head of the unions have fought bitterly and effectively against the amalgamation of the unions, the organization of the unorganized, the formation of a labor party, and the adoption of various other measures that would make the unions real fighting organizations. The result has been annihilation of the trade unions and the growth of company unions. The reactionary trade union officials are the real organizers of the company unions.

An especially menacing feature of the company union movement is the pronounced tendency of the trade union

bureaucracy to accept its principles and practices and to transform the trade unions into company unions. This tendency expresses itself through the so-called B. & O. Plan and the "new wage policy" adopted by the American Federation of Labor at its recent convention. Refusing to militantly fight against the employers, the trade union bureaucrats are surrendering to them by entering into agreements with them to raise production and to abolish strikes. The adoption of the B. & O. Plan was a long step in the direction of company unionism and class collaboration generally. Already sections of the employers and the trade union bureaucrats foresee a practical merging of the trade union and company union movement. In such a consolidation the demands of the reactionary bureaucracy would be comparatively simple. Neglecting the interests of the workers as usual, their principal demand would be for the maintenance of some sort of a dues-paying organization which would serve to pay their fat salaries and to finance their labor banks and other trade union capitalist schemes. In return for this concession, they would defend the interests of the employers even more militantly than now against the insistent demands of the masses in general and the left wing in particular. The occasional outcries of the bureaucrats against the company unions cannot hide the fact that these same bureaucrats are tending strongly in the direction of accepting company unionism.

The fight against company unionism must be made a special point of business by the trade union movement. To destroy the company unions is an essential part of the great task of organizing the unorganized millions in the industry. The slogan must be, "Destroy the Company Unions and form Trade Unions." If necessary we must penetrate the company unions when they have a mass following and disintegrate them from within, utilizing the resultant movements among the workers for the inauguration of wage and organizing campaigns. The experience during the movement of the steel workers in 1918-19, as well as among other groups of workers, shows clearly that the workers will not only demolish the company unions, but also use them as starting points for the formation of real trade unions.

But the fight against company unionism must be accompanied by a militant struggle in the unions against its first

cousins, the B. & O. Plan and the various forms of trade union capitalism, such as labor banking, trade union life insurance, etc. The Trade Union Educational League, embracing the most conscious and progressive elements among the workers, must carry on an unremitting campaign against the B. & O. Plan and every other manifestation of class collaboration. It must play a leading part in the consolidation of the unorganized masses, in the development of a new leadership for the unions, in the mobilization of the working class for a policy of real struggle against the employers.

Company unionism, including its trade union phase, the B. & O. Plan, is a menacing barrier to the progress of the workers. The road to working class emancipation lies through its shattered fragments.
